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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to examine the high risk/high need youth population of West Virginia. Workers from 55 county school boards, 27 area offices of health centers, private and public psychiatric hospitals with adolescent units, juvenile probation offices, and state juvenile correctional facilities were asked to nominate certain youths as high risk/high need. A data analysis of the 2,084 nominees showed that most were white (93.1 percent), male (70.4 percent), and between the ages of 14 and 17 (approximately 76 percent). Data obtained from Personal Profile instruments completed for a random sample of nominees depicted the high risk/high need youth as living at home with his natural family, often left unsupervised, rarely involved in social activities, experiencing problems at school, and likely to have court contact for delinquency proceedings. Families of high risk/high need youth often had below average incomes and a history of alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, and criminal activities. The data suggested that the needs of high risk/high need youths were not being met. Recommendations based on this data include more individualized services, more coordination of services among agencies, and community analysis of available services and barriers to receiving services. (NRB)

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ASSESSMENT OF HIGH RISK/HIGH NEED YOUTH IN WEST VIRGINIA

Prepared for

The Office of Juvenile Justice
and Delinquency Prevention

U.S. Department of Justice

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March, 1984

Many young people are falling through the cracks in our social service system. A lack of coordinated service planning and follow-through, too few dollars allocated for social services, and a scarcity of innovative, community programs have helped to create gaps in our human services network. The high risk/high need youngster has become the victim of these shortcomings. While theories abound on the high risk/high need youth, very little empirical data is available to document the extent of the problem, or the needs of these youngsters.

In late spring of 1983, staff counsel for the West Virginia Supreme Court Juvenile Justice Committee drew together various groups and individuals from around the state who had demonstrated interest regarding the welfare of high risk/high need youngsters. The Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation awarded a six-month grant to the National Council of Jewish Women--West Virginia Section, Inc., on behalf of this group, to look closely at the high risk/high need youth population in West Virginia. Specifically, the Benedum proposal sought to determine the number of high risk/high need youths in the state, to develop a profile of these young people, and to explore existing, innovative program models for troubled youngsters. The information gleaned from the Study was to be shared with social service providers around the state, as well as agency administrators, program developers, legislators, and interested community members for their use in advocating and planning for the needs of these children.

The first part of the Study--the Nomination Phase--had as its goal to determine the number of high risk/high need youths in the state. Public agencies that work with children and adolescents were contacted by trained, community volunteers, to explain the Study and to disseminate the data collection instrument. Nomination Forms were distributed to the 55 county school boards, the 27 area offices of health centers (including satellite offices), private and public psychiatric hospitals having adolescent units, juvenile probation offices, and state juvenile correctional facilities. Workers from these agencies were asked to "nominate" as high risk/need any youth with whom they were currently working who met one or more of the criteria listed on the form. In all, over 6,000 blank forms were distributed around the state to youth workers from the above agencies.

Response to the Study from agency personnel was overwhelming. (See Tables I and II.) Over 90 percent of the agencies contacted chose to participate in the effort by either nominating youths from their caseloads, or indicating that none of their youths met the criteria. Analysis of the preliminary

results indicates that 2,309 completed nomination forms were received, representing a total of 2,084 high risk/high need youths.[1] (See Table III.)

A brief demographic analysis shows that approximately 70 percent of the nominees were male (see Table IV), and most (almost 76 percent) were between the ages of 14 and 17. By far, the largest percentage of youths were white (93.1 percent), with the remainder of the nominees either black, oriental, or other, or "race not reported." (See Table V).

The greatest number of nominations--42.3 percent of the total--were received from school personnel. Department of Human Services workers also nominated a significant percentage of high risk/high need children (31.4 percent). The remaining nominations were offered by therapists/counselors/psychologists at community mental health centers, West Virginia Supreme Court juvenile probation officers,[2] correctional facilities personnel, professionals working at private and public psychiatric hospitals, and health services employees. (See Table II.)

The second phase of the Study entailed profiling a select number of randomly chosen nominees, to develop a composite of the high risk/high need youth. The intent of the Personal Profile, the data gathering instrument used for this phase, was to personalize the nominees, to provide a glimpse past the demographic information of race, sex, and age, and develop a portrait of the individual child and his family. Of interest, was whether there were outstanding similarities in the backgrounds of high risk/high need youngsters, which might prove significant in developing intervention strategies for these children.

Based on preliminary findings of the Study, the following picture of the high risk/high need child emerges. The high risk/high need youth has spent most of his life with his natural family, has lived with at least one parent consistently, but has been left alone or unsupervised for large periods of time. (See Tables VI-VIII.) While a number of these children have never experienced a formal placement outside of their home, over half of the young people have had at least one, and sometimes many out-of-home placements. (See Tables IX

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[1]The difference of 225 nominees represents duplicate nominations--that is, more than one worker or agency completed forms on the same child, as evidenced by cross-tabulation indicators included for that purpose. All of the statistics appearing in this Executive Summary have been corrected for duplicates; the data will reflect information on the number of high risk/high need individuals, rather than the total number of nominations.

[2]In soliciting nominations from juvenile probation officers employed by the West Virginia Supreme Court, several counties were inadvertently excluded. Nominations from the following county probation offices (Supreme Court only) are missing: Berkeley, Boone, Logan and Wyoming.

and X.) The high risk/high need young person has friends, but is rarely involved in social activities, such as sports, school-related events, or recreation. They attend school, but have a number of school problems, including truancy, suspensions, and being held back grade levels. (See Table XI.) There is a good chance that the high risk/high need child will at some time enter a special education program, either for a learning disability, a behavior disorder, or both. It is unlikely that they will participate in vocational classes while enrolled in school. It is likely, however, that the youth will have some contact with the court for delinquency proceedings, whether for minor, or more serious, offenses. (See Table XII.)

High risk/high need youths are not alone with their problems. Too often, the family has a below average income, supporting between three to six people. The young person's brothers and sisters are likely to be experiencing the same troubles as they: school difficulties, court proceedings, out-of-home placements and, too often, abuse and neglect, Indeed, the child's problems are mirrored in the family--excessive use of alcohol or drugs, domestic violence, criminal proceedings. (See Tables XIII-XVI.)

Even more alarming than this bleak portrait of the high risk/high need youth is that while professionals who work with these young people are eager to ensure that their clients receive needed services, it is apparent that this is not happening. For example, when asked what general services were needed for an ideal rehabilitation plan for specific youths, 88.6 percent of the professional respondents noted that family therapy was needed. It was also reported by the respondents that family therapy was available in 93.7 percent of their communities. Yet, when asked whether family therapy had ever been utilized in these same cases, 53.4 percent of the youths had <u>never</u> been involved with family therapy, and only 10.5 percent were currently receiving family counseling services. Similar statistics can be cited for drug and alcohol services, vocational training, educational services, and individual counseling, among others. (See Table XVII.)

What, then, can and should be done to ensure that high risk/high need youths are not the victims of service gaps? While the results from the Study have been analyzed too recently to posit final recommendations, a few suggestions can be made. First, there must be more individualization of services. By this, a two-pronged approach is intended: (1) the high risk/high need youth must be viewed as an individual, with a service plan designed to meet the total needs of the child; and (2) programs must have an individualized approach to the youthful client, being flexible enough to meet the youth's needs, rather than expecting the young person to conform to the program's approach. Second, more coordination of services among agencies is crucial. The high risk/high need youth is often involved with more than one agency; service coordination is essential if consistency in planning, implementation, and follow-through are to be ensured. Third, communities must conduct a nondefensive, realistic analysis of the services available in the community, and examine the blockages which exist to receiving those services. Without careful analysis, services will continue to be seriously under-utilized by those who so desperately need them.

The West Virginia High Risk/High Need Youth Study should be viewed as a first step in developing an effective, service delivery system for troubled youngsters. Further cooperative efforts must be taken to ensure that the Study's results find application, rather than becoming yet another report with recommendations filed away for imagined future reference. To ensure that this does not happen, this Study brings with it the commitment of the individuals and organizations who made the proposal a reality.*

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*For copies of the complete Study, The West Virginia High Risk/High Need Youth: A Population Profile, contact: The National Council of Jewish Women--West Virginia Section, 1218 Quarrier Street, Charleston, WV 25301, 304/344-3970.

TABLE I
NOMINATION FORM DATA: NUMBER OF NOMINATIONS BY COUNTY

( ) Indicates missing data from the enclosed agency.

Barbour--16
Berkeley--74 (see footnote 2 in text)
Boone--42 (see footnote 2 in text)
Braxton--60
Brooke--42 (schools)
Cabell--131
Calhoun--9
Clay--19
Doddridge--35
Fayette--36
Gilmer--8
Grant--11
Greenbrier--38
Hampshire--43
Hancock--20
Hardy--16
Harrison--39 (schools)
Jackson--20
Jefferson--13
Kanawha--181
Lewis--30
Lincoln--33
Logan--23 (see footnote 2 in text)
Marion--47
Marshall--43
Mason--9 (schools)
McDowell--39
Mercer--140
Mineral--15
Mingo--32
Monongalia--114
Monroe--1
Morgan--28
Nicholas--38
Ohio--70
Pendleton--1
Pleasants--0
Pocahontas--18
Preston--20
Putnam--33
Raleigh--124
Randolph--42
Ritchie--17
Roane--21
Summers--6 (schools, mental health)
Taylor--6
Tucker--17
Tyler--14
Upshur--29
Wayne--30
Webster--16
Wetzel--21
Wirt--26
Wood--84 (schools)
Wyoming--23 (see footnote 2 in text)

TABLE II
NOMINATION FORM DATA: NUMBER AND
PERCENTAGE OF NOMINEES BY NOMINATING AGENCY

	Number of Nominees	Percentage of Nominees
Schools	881	42.3
Human Services	655	31.4
Mental Health	271	13.0
Supreme Court	216	10.4
Correctional Facility	39	1.9
Psychiatric Hospital	20	1.0
Health Service	2	.1
TOTALS	2,084	100.0

TABLE III
NOMINATION FORM DATA: NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF NOMINEES BY CRITERIA

	Number of Nominees	Percentage of Nominees	Number of Criteria Only Nominees	Percentage of Criteria Only Nominees
Has had multiple suspensions, as evidenced by a history of suspensions (and still a problem) or suspensions recently increasing in number.*	1,264	60.7	320	15.4
Has been expelled from school during the last academic year.	467	22.4	43	2.1
Has a history of suicide attempts.	186	8.9	27	1.3
Has a history of prostitution.	117	5.6	10	.5
Has been formally diagnosed as having a psychotic disorder.	189	9.1	31	1.5
Has a significant problem with drugs or alcohol, as evidenced by multiple charges or convictions of driving under the influence (DUI), or intoxication, or possession, or evidence of chemical addiction or dependency.	576	27.6	65	3.1

*The large number of youths having experienced multiple suspensions from school suggests that this set of criteria, in and of itself, may not indicate a high risk/high need child. The total number of high risk/high need youths, as reported in this Study, would then be reduced by 320, the number of young people nominated for multiple suspensions only.

	Number of Nominees	Percentage of Nominees	Number of Criteria Only Nominees	Percentage of Criteria Only Nominees
Has a history of fire setting or charges of arson.	79	3.8	4	.2
Has a history of animal abuse.	62	3.0	5	.2
Has repeatedly run away from living situation with prolonged instances of living on the street.	668	32.1	79	3.8
Has a history of violent or serious assaultive behavior with or without the use of weapons	679	32.6	86	4.1
Has a history of multiple unsuccessful out-of-home placements.	585	28.1	14	.7
TOTALS	2,084	100.0	684	32.8

TABLE IV
SEX OF NOMINEE

	Number of Nominees	Percentage of Nominees
Male	1,467	70.4
Female	613	29.4
Not Reported	4	.2
TOTALS	2,084	100.0

TABLE V
RACE OF NOMINEES

	Number of Nominees	Percentage of Nominees
White	1,940	93.1
Black	117	5.6
Oriental	1	.0
Other	18	.9
Not Reported	8	.4
TOTALS	2,084	100.0

TABLE VI
WHERE IS YOUTH CURRENTLY LIVING?

	Absolute Frequency (#)*	Relative Frequency (%)**	Adjusted Frequency (%)***
Natural Home	151	53.0	55.5
Foster Home	26	9.2	9.6
Detention	9	3.2	3.3
Group Care	28	9.8	10.3
Corrections	15	5.3	5.5
Hospital	5	1.8	1.8
Independent	4	1.4	1.5
Emergency Shelter	2	.7	.7
Out-of-State Treatment Center	8	2.9	2.9
Adoptive Parents	4	1.4	1.5
Relatives	16	5.6	5.9
Friends	4	1.4	1.5
Unknown/ Not Answered	13	4.6	n/a
TOTALS	285	100.0	100.0

*"Absolute frequency" is the number of cases with each value.

**"Relative frequency" is the percentage of all cases each value represents.

***"Adjusted frequency" is the percentage each value represents after removing the unanswered or missing cases from the total.

TABLE VII
HAS THE YOUTH LIVED WITH AT LEAST
ONE PARENT CONSISTENTLY?

	Absolute Frequency (#)	Relative Frequency (%)	Adjusted Frequency (%)
Yes	202	70.9	72.7
No	76	26.7	27.3
Unknown/Not Answered	7	2.5	n/a
TOTALS	285	100.0	100.0

TABLE VIII
HAS THE YOUTH BEEN LEFT ALONE/UNSUPERVISED
FOR SUBSTANTIAL PERIODS? (paraphrased)

	Absolute Frequency (#)	Relative Frequency (%)	Adjusted Frequency (%)
Yes	131	46.0	68.6
No	66	21.1	31.4
Unknown/Not Answered	94	33.0	n/a
TOTALS	285	100.0	100.0

TABLE IX
NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS OUTSIDE FAMILY SETTING

	Absolute Frequency (#)	Relative Frequency (%)	Adjusted Frequency (%)
None	118	41.4	45.4
One	29	10.2	11.2
Two	30	10.5	11.5
Three	22	7.7	8.5
Four	19	6.7	7.3
Five	17	6.0	6.5
Six to Ten	18	6.3	6.9
Over Ten	7	2.5	2.7
Unknown/Not Answered	25	8.8	n/a
TOTALS	285	100.0%	100.0%

TABLE X
WHICH...BEST DESCRIBES THE YOUTH'S LIVING SITUATION?

	Absolute Frequency (#)	Relative Frequency (%)	Adjusted Frequency (%)
With Family	227	79.6	81.7
One Placement	8	2.8	2.9
Series of Placements	38	13.3	13.7
Other (unspecified)	4	1.4	1.4
Other (series of runaways)	1	.4	.4
Unknown/Unanswered	7	2.5	n/a
TOTALS	285	100.0	100.0

TABLE XI
SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

	Yes	No	Unknown/ Unanswered	Totals
Uses Drugs/Alcohol	*123	88	74	285
	**43.2%	30.9%	26.0%	100.0%
	***58.3%	23.9%	n/a	100.0%
Uses Drugs/Alcohol for Years	100	107	78	285
	35.1%	37.5%	27.4%	100.0%
	48.3%	51.7%	n/a	100.0%
Has Adequate Clothing	219	55	11	285
	76.8%	19.3%	3.9%	100.0%
	79.9%	20.1%	n/a	100.0%
Has Driver's License	22	241	22	285
	7.7%	84.6%	7.7%	100.0%
	8.4%	91.6%	n/a	100.0%
Has Worked	64	201	20	285
	22.5%	70.5%	7.1%	100.0%
	24.2%	75.8%	n/a	100.0%
Has Friends	227	42	16	285
	79.6%	14.7%	5.7%	100.0%
	84.4%	15.6%	n/a	100.0%
Involved in Activities	67	205	13	285
	23.5%	71.9%	4.6%	100.0%
	24.6%	75.4%	n/a	100.0%

*Absolute Frequency.

**Relative Frequency.

***Adjusted Frequency.

TABLE XII
CRIMINAL COURT PROCEEDINGS

A. "Has the youth been in court proceedings for criminal offenses?"

	Absolute Frequency (#)	Relative Frequency (%)	Adjusted Frequency (%)
Yes	128	44.9	51.0
No	123	43.2	49.0
Unknown/Not Answered	34	11.9	n/a
TOTALS	285	100.0	100.0

B. Types of Proceedings

	Single Offense	Multiple Offense	Not Applicable	Unknown/Not Answered	TOTALS
Serious Personal Injury	*12	11	121	141	285
	**4.2%	3.9%	42.9%	49.5%	100.0%
	***52.2%	47.8%	n/a	n/a	100.0%
Serious Property Damage	13	26	121	125	285
	4.6%	9.1%	42.4%	43.9%	100.0%
	33.3%	66.7%	n/a	n/a	100.0%
Auto Theft	28	9	121	127	285
	9.8%	3.2%	42.4%	44.5%	100.0%
	75.7%	24.3%	n/a	n/a	100.0%
Drug-Related	13	16	121	135	285
	4.6%	5.6%	42.4%	47.4%	100.0%
	44.8%	55.2%	n/a	n/a	100.0%
Minor	37	55	121	72	285
	13.0%	19.3%	42.4%	25.3%	100.0%
	40.2%	59.8%	n/a	n/a	100.0%
Unknown	2	1	121	161	285
	0.7%	0.3%	42.4%	56.5%	100.0%
	66.7%	33.3%	n/a	n/a	100.0%
Other	28		121	136	285
	9.8%		42.4%	47.7%	100.0%
	100.0%		n/a	n/a	100.0%

*Absolute Frequency.

**Relative Frequency.

***Adjusted Frequency.

TABLE XIII
ESTIMATED FAMILY INCOME

	Absolute Frequency (#)	Relative Frequency (%)	Adjusted Frequency (%)
Below Average (less than $12,000)	183	64.2	71.5
Average ($12,000 to $25,000)	61	21.4	23.8
Above Average (greater than $25,000)	12	4.2	4.7
Unknown/Not Answered	29	10.2	n/a
TOTALS	285	100.0	100.0

TABLE XIV
NUMBER OF PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY INCOME

	Absolute Frequency (#)	Relative Frequency (%)	Adjusted Frequency (%)
One	4	1.4	1.9
Two	25	8.8	11.6
Three	44	15.4	20.5
Four	64	22.5	29.8
Five	42	14.7	19.5
Six	18	6.3	8.4
Seven	11	3.9	5.1
Eight	6	2.1	2.8
Nine	0	0.0	0.0
Ten	1	.4	.5
Unknown/Not Answered	70	24.6	n/a
TOTALS	285	100.0	100.0

TABLE XV
PROBLEMS OF SIBLINGS

	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Unknown Unanswered	TOTALS
School Difficulties	*157	34	23	71	285
	**55.1%	11.9%	8.1%	24.9%	100.0%
	***82.2%	17.8%	n/a	n/a	100.0%
Court Proceedings	98	70	23	94	285
	34.4%	24.6%	8.1%	33.0%	100.0%
	58.3%	41.7%	n/a	n/a	100.0%
Out-of-Home Placements	75	101	23	86	285
	26.3%	35.4%	8.1%	30.2%	100.0%
	42.6%	57.4%	n/a	n/a	100.0%
Proceedings for Abuse/ Neglect	60	101	23	101	285
	21.1%	35.4%	8.1%	35.5%	100.0%
	37.3%	62.7%	n/a	n/a	100.0%

*Absolute Frequency.

**Relative Frequency.

***Adjusted Frequency.

TABLE XVI
PROBLEMS WITHIN THE FAMILY

	Yes	No	Unknown/ Unanswered	TOTALS
Alconol or Drugs	*151	40	94	285
	**53.0%	14.0%	33.0%	100.0%
	***79.1%	20.9%	n/a	100.0%
Domestic Violence	126	58	101	285
	44.2%	20.4%	35.5%	100.0%
	68.5%	31.5%	n/a	100.0%
Incarceration	78	94	113	285
	27.4%	33.0%	39.7%	100.0%
	45.3%	54.7%	n/a	100.0%
Mental Illness	35	99	151	285
	12.3%	34.7%	53.0%	100.0%
	26.1%	73.9%	n/a	100.0%
Mental Retardation	39	121	125	285
	13.7%	42.5%	43.8%	100.0%
	24.4%	75.6%	n/a	100.0%
Physical Disability or Illness	68	89	128	285
	23.9%	31.2%	44.9%	100.0%
	43.3%	56.7%	n/a	100.0%
Other	16	22	247	285
	5.6%	7.7%	86.7%	100.0%
	42.1%	57.9%	n/a	100.0%

*Absolute Frequency.

**Relative Frequency.

***Adjusted Frequency.

TABLE XVII
COMPARISONS OF SERVICE NEEDS VERSUS
SERVICE AVAILABILITY AND USE*

Service Type	Number of Responses	In Need of Service	For Those Cases in Need of a Service: Service Not Available	For Those Cases in Need of a Service: Service Never Utilized
Health	226	124(54.8%)	5(4.0%)	19(19.6%)
Nutrition	201	87(43.3%)	7(8.0%)	16(21.1%)
Economic	174	105(60.3%)	47(47.7%)	figure not available
Housing	191	73(38.2%)	24(32.8%)	28(58.3%)
Mental Health	254	221(87.0%)	10(4.5%)	48(17.6%)
Drug/Alcohol Counseling	202	115(56.9%)	20(17.4%)	figure not available
Recreation	243	208(85.6%)	80(38.5%)	140(79.1%)
Supervision/ Companionship	228	209(91.7%)	75(35.9%)	107(74.3%)
Education	266	254(95.5%)	11(4.3%)	122(42.8%)
Vocational	244	200(82.0%)	29(14.5%)	166(60.8%)
Employment	223	168(75.3%)	97(57.7%)	figure not available
Transportation	204	109(53.4%)	52(47.7%)	figure not available
Family Therapy	245	220(89.8%)	13(5.9%)	52(48.1%)

*All percentages are adjusted for missing cases.